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The Annihilation of *Kill la Kill's* Empire of Clothing: An Analysis of its Pivotal Themes

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Abstract

The 2013-2014 Studio Trigger anime- *Kill la* Kill, has evoked such surprise and amazement from fans worldwide- that some even proclaim that it has **'saved anime'**. Despite its powerful reputation within fan spaces, this anime has also been greatly criticised. With its heavy violence, scandalously sentient school clothing, ferocious characters, and mind-blowing scenes; *Kill la Kill* is purposely made to subvert themes in a way that elicit responses of shock and surprise. In this dissertation, possible explanations as to why certain themes emerge so frequently within the anime; their impact- as well as their possible connections to real-life incidents- will be made in order to hypothesize *Kill la* Kill's hidden messages. Albeit being made for entertainment purposes, this is certainly an anime that can be interpreted in numerous ways- and that may be what makes *Kill la Kill* so interesting to watch.

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Introduction

Anime is a Japanese form of animation that combines both 2D and 3D effects to create dynamic scenes, movements, and characters. At first, anime relied heavily on hand-drawn frames when making scenes, but they are increasingly using both digitally made frames as well as 3D animation.

Released between 2013-2014[1], *Kill la Kill* is an animated series that took the world by storm. They have subtitles available in 5 languages on various streaming networks and can be watched in many countries worldwide. (Network, 2013)

The anime was produced by **Studio Trigger,** and its main production team consists of: Imaishi Hiroyuki (director), SUSHIO (Character Design and Animation Director), Amemiya

[1] (IMDB, n.d.) A robotic (mecha), psychological drama anime made in 1995.

Akira (Assistant Director) and Yoshinari You (Set Designer)- who have lovingly been dubbed *'Trigger's Elite Four'* in *The Making of Kill La Kill*[2].

Kill la Kill was Imaishi's first Studio Trigger anime. Before he co-founded Studio Trigger with Masahiko Ōtsuka in 2011; he worked in many roles for a variety of anime produced by Studio Gainax-such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*[3]; and has produced original shows such as *Dead Leaves (*2004), *Panty and Stocking with Garterbelt*(2010) and *Gurren Lagann*(2007). (IMDB, n.d.) He also played a major role[4] in the development of their coming-of-age anime named *FLCL (*2000), which focuses on the story of a boy who is suddenly fated to save the world. (Myanimelist, n.d.)

Imaishi's time as a director in *Gainax* was exemplified when he collaborated with the script writer Nakashima Kazuki for *Gurren Lagann*. (Schley, 2019) Together, their team created a series that memorialized 70s and 80s robot anime- and it remains popular today. (Barder, 2018) With powerful transformations, a crazy cast of characters and bold animation, its visionary Studio Gainax style[5] provided as the recipe for success in their next joint project- ***Kill la Kill***- as well. The **Imaishi-Nakashima** combination is classed as being 'fearless' towards changing directions and gears[6], by intentionally aiming to surprise their viewers.

In the words of Imaishi himself, Studio Trigger aims to create works that are bizarre; ones whose ideas go against the 'flow' of viewer expectations, in order to evoke feelings of shock and fascination. (The Making of Kill la Kill (Part 1), 2011-2014)Their anime is meant to have surprising plot twists, in order to challenge anime watchers' perceptions of various themes.

Kill la Kill has elicited an immense response from fans. Despite there not being many scholarly articles on the anime itself, fan theories on all sorts of elements within *Kill la Kill*'s narrative are available worldwide, proving that Studio Trigger's surprising narrative themes definitely inspire watchers to think outside of the box.

Hence, it is important to provide an analysis of this anime, in order to see which themes and elements within the anime could be responsible for evoking such a vast response worldwide.

As an anime filled to the brim with a variety of genres, *Kill la Kill* is hard to describe. Brimming with violence, nudity, and blood, the setting is a post-apocalyptic rendition of modern Japan. *Kill la Kill* depicts the misadventures of a 17-year-old rebel, known as *Ryuuko Matoi* – as she fights her way into the deadliest school in Japan, ***Honnouji Academy***.

Hoping to avenge her father's death, she confronts its leader- a tyrannical student council president named *Satsuki Kiryūin*. However, Ryuuko's vengeance unwittingly assists Satsuki's plans to dominate the entirety of Japanese schools. Equipping only her best students with

[2] The Making of Kill la Kill- a three-part documentary spanning Studio Trigger's *Kill la Kill* journey- from its production to its release. (The Making of Kill la Kill (part 2), 2011-2014)
[3] (Barder, 2018)
[4] He worked as a member of the Storyboard team, Layout, Assistant Animation Director, Setting, Key Animation and Animation Director in *FLCL.* (Myanimelist, n.d.)
[5] Studio Gainax was popular for its 'unusual' and 'thought-provoking' anime. (Fujita, 2021)
[6] (The Making of Kill la Kill (Part 1), 2011-2014)

strength enhancing Goku Uniforms, Satsuki's army uses Ryuuko as a test subject to trial their power against.

However, if one loses against Ryuuko; they will be stripped of their wealth and status- making Honou Town a place of severe class disparity.

As Ryuuko takes on Satsuki's army, she becomes an unwitting revolutionary to a secret war. With a talking magical costume named *Senketsu*[7] by her side, Ryuuko will fight her way to the truth- stripping many opponents of their *Goku Uniforms* along the way.

However, this battle erupts into a war between humans and parasitic clothing, as the dark past shared between the Kiryūin and Matoi families is finally unravelled. Ragyo Kiryūin, Satsuki's mother- is the harbinger of all chaos- her capitalist clothing empire, *REVOCS*[8]-is what gives these clothing parasites the ability to devour the Earth, transforming it into a 'single thread'.

A vital note regarding the inspirations behind *Kill la Kill* is the fact that its entire narrative is inspired by 1970s battle manga[9]. In fact, Nakashima reveals that after researching many 1970s battle manga together, the manga named *Otokogumi*(1974)- which is a tale about a Chinese martial artist who is hired to defeat a politically and economically corrupt high school tyrant[10]- ended up serving as the catalyst *for Kill la Kill*. (Kobayashi, 2013, p. 2)

Studio Trigger has been very faithful to *Otokogum*i, for *Kill la Kill* also focuses heavily on school conflict, with student-lead corporal punishment and corrupt dealings reigning supreme throughout most of the anime. This information provides a necessary background to its political themes.

In fact, Nakashima humorously confesses that whilst discussing how they'd like to make clothes a weapon of mass destruction in *Kill la Kill*, Imaishi came up with the phrase *'Conquer with school uniforms, fashion is fascism'*[11]. Indeed, *Kill la Kill* may be doing just that: clothes are used for world domination, invasion and even as a means to improve one's own living conditions.

To place this theory against a critical lens, *Kill la Kill* will be compared to Umberto Eco's famous fascist theory, 'Ur-Fascism'; which details the most important features of a fascist society.

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[7] 鮮血(fresh blood)

[8] Ragyo's clothing brand. It takes over the world's stock market; owns factories worldwide; and becomes the only brand of clothing people wear on Earth.

[9] 'School conflict manga' [学園抗争マンガ], also known as ヤンキー漫画 (delinquent manga). This genre focuses on the friendships and battles between different groups of students at school. (Chronological Trends/ 年代流行, n.d.)

[10] (Myanimelist, n.d.) 'The story revolves around combats between the two. The dual develops into extensive conflicts involving high school students nationwide, and eventually leading figures in political and economic circles. The series established a new genre of manga highlighted by conflicts on campus.'

[11] 「制服で征服,ファッションはファッショだ」 (Kobayashi, 2013, p. 3)

Kill la Kill also mirrors 'Shōwa fascism'[12], whose 'statist' policies directed immense control over economic and social policy- so it will be compared to the Japanese Empire system as well. (OER SERVICES, n.d.)

The roles of clothing and nudity are also central to *Kill la Kill*. The anime's goal was to use sailor-style school uniforms as weaponry. Historically, school uniforms made for boys in Japan were in fact based off naval military attire. (Kobayashi, 2013, p. 3) *Kill la Kill's* uniforms have incredible military power yet are only given them if they obey Satsuki.

In contrast, Satsuki's political opposition, *Nudist Beach* (a guerrilla warfare party) fight naked in robots, giving the impression that nudity might be freedom. Ryuuko also becomes much stronger over the course of the series as she grows to accept her body by 'going naked'-emphasising that self-acceptance is integral to strength in *Kill la Kill*.

However, the protagonist Ryuuko's magical sailor suit-Senketsu-is also what gives her the strength to fight against Satsuki's collective of naval uniforms- and against the invasion of parasitic clothes that appear later on, emphasising just how interesting *Kill la Kill's* debate on how conflicting the nature of clothes and nudity truly are. As Japan's laws on censorship- which were also introduced in the Shōwa era[13]- are so strict, it is also interesting to see the many techniques *Kill la Kill* uses to bypass such a law.

Kill la Kill is an official love-letter to Shōwa Era[14] anime and manga. However, although this era began from 1926; the columnist Fujita emphasises that in terms of animation, this 'nostalgia' refers more to post-World War II Japan; who witnessed a huge boom of animation studios and manga greats such as Osamu Tezuka. (Fujita, 2020) In their imitation of post-World War II animation effects, they effectively pass on their gratitude to senior animators.

These stylistic choices play an important role in understanding how the themes of *Kill la Kill* work- its link to the past is a vital aspect. It is thanks to Shōwa Era battle manga and its over-the-top animation styles that *Kill la Kill* became the way that it is today.

This dissertation will examine the possible meanings behind *Kill la Kill's* portrayal of political issues, and the battle between clothing and nudity.

Literature Review

Only two scholarly articles about *Kill la Kill* were found. Both class the anime as a revolutionary piece of writing in its presentation of gender and sexuality.

Firstly, Adams' article- *Choice, Eroticism, and Femininity: A Feminist Framing of Trigger's Kill la Kill*- focuses heavily on the portrayal of women within the anime. In his analysis of all 24

[12] (Takashi, 2008) usually used in reference to the wartime regime

[13] Article 175 was introduced in 1907, but its implementation as the 'obscenity law' was during the Shōwa era. Media that the government deems as 'obscene' will be fined heavily, so Japanese erotic media uses many means to bypass this law. (da Silva, 2013)

[14] Showa Era- it lasted from 1926- 1989 (Britannica, n.d.)

episodes, he argues that *Kill la Kill* makes a mockery of 'fanservice'[15]; and that fans should judge it by its true nature as a feminist[16] story. (Adams, n.d.) For example, both Ryuuko and Satsuki can only unleash the full potential of their magical school uniforms (*Senketsu* and *Junketsu*) if they embrace their nudity. This provides them with a resistance against 'outside views of sexuality'. (Adams, n.d.) These 'outside views' are the heteronormative standards of society, that leer at and cajole women based on the attire they wear.

As Senketsu is very skimpy, Ryuuko is called names such as a 'whore' and 'slut' for her attire; and her only way to reject this is by accepting her body. Therefore, it is clear to see how *Kill la Kill*'s message on body positivity can be seen as a feminist one.

He also explains how the relationships between women in this anime subverts traditional gender roles. Referring to Adrienne Rich's theory on how society sees relationships between women as purely lesbianism; he describes how Ryuuko's relationship with Mako's mother (Sukuyo) is a prime example of how women can also platonically love one another. (Adams, n.d.) The character, Mako- also showcases the beauty of 'platonic lesbian relationships', by prioritising her female friends over men. Though she doesn't dislike men, she forms closer bonds with women. (Adams, n.d.)

These characters are the antithesis of regular portrayals of women in anime- typically women tend to be in a harem, fighting bitterly for a single man's attention. In its portrayal of loving relationships between women, *Kill la Kill* subverts gender stereotypes.

Adams also emphasises how the more 'masculine' characters in *Kill la Kill* depict women in ground-breaking ways. For example, Ragyo Kiryūin- who is the villainous matriarch of the anime- is called a 'sexually deviant fashionista' for her criminal reputation: not only does she threaten the fate of the world with her parasitic clothes; she also abuses and shames anybody she can get her hands on.

Although she possesses a very 'masculine' drive for power and ambition- she is still very traditionally minded, for she supports conventions such as body-shaming and marriage. However, her daughters- who are extremely violent and competitive, are not traditionally minded in the slightest.

Because of this, they can set themselves free from their mother's constraints- highlighting that *Kill la Kill* supports the diversity of their female characters.

Adams' article makes very precise observations about the anime's characters, making it an excellent read. His article shows how positive female relationships are much more empowering than ones in which women fight for the affection for a love interest. In addition to that, his comparison of Ryuuko and Satsuki's approaches to bodily empowerment and how it can be contrasted against Ragyo's sexual abuse and lust for power-is very interesting.

[15] Fanservice- Scenes that are made to excite fans. This is divided into: sexual content (beach bikinis, nudity, underwear) or heavy action (high-budget fighting scenes) (urbandictionary, 2003)
[16] A movement for gender equality.

It can be interpreted from this that *Kill la Kill* is urging women to set themselves free from the constraints of traditional gender roles and live by their own standards instead.

However, the note he made about how Ryuuko's final transformation (*Senketsu Kisaragi/ fresh blood fashion week*[17]) serves as a representation of each female character's 'final forms of femininity', was a very touching point that should've been further developed. What exactly did he mean by this? That each character reaches their womanhood by the end of the anime?

A final issue with his article is that because *Kill la Kill* has so many themes, he wasn't able to explore political aspects of the anime in more detail.

The second article- Boyd's *'Nonsensical is our thing!': Queering fanservice as 'Deleuzional' desire, production in Studio Trigger's Kiru ra Kiru/Kill la Kill*- was a difficult read, as its jargon was hard to understand. His argument is that *Kill la Kill's* rampant scenes of 'fanservice' may subvert the heteronormative standards of society. (Boyd, 2016)

Heteronormativity is defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGC) to be the state when people assume that everyone is heterosexual, which leads to them ignoring- or even devaluing- other sexualities in their process of idealizing heterosexuality. (Equality, 2009) Boyd believes that *Kill la Kill* subverts this by focusing heavily on its female cast- which sequentially erases any male presence. (Boyd, 2016)

Just like Adams, Boyd compares *Kill la Kill* to anime that stereotypically consists of women fighting over male love interests- but this time, he also adds that such anime is typically made to titillate a male otaku[18] audience.

However, Boyd states that in *Kill la Kill*, the characters diverge greatly from this stereotype. Men are not just minor characters compared to the women in *Kill la Kill*; they are also subject to just as much fanservice as the women. In addition to that, the protagonists- Ryuuko and Mako, are said to embrace a same-sex relationship; which negates any man from romancing them. (Boyd, 2016)

Boyd describes how Mako herself fits media portrayals of LGBTQ identity: her scenes are bright, cheerful, colourful and camp. (Boyd, 2016) The anime's exclusion of heterosexual romance cliches, inclusion of fanservice that exploits ***all*** characters- irrespective of their gender, erasure of male love interests, and proud acceptance of Mako's non-heteronormative identity- is what makes it so powerful.

In addition to this, he states that the 'otaku gaze' -that commodifies and leers at female characters- has purposely been warped by the creators. This is because said fans' perverted views were inserted into cutest character of them all- a 'kawaii'[19] , yet murderous villain named Harime Nui, who gropes; tortures and bullies Ryuuko in a similar manner to the fans

[17] (Adams, n.d., p. 14)

[18] Otaku- over-enthusiastic fans of things such as anime, who have detailed knowledge (Goo Dictionary Japan, n.d.)

[19] Kawaii- small, weak, and childish things. Also refers to 'cute' fashion and accessories. (Goo Dictionary Japan, n.d.)

she represents. In truth, the male presence still exists, but by placing traits that are commonly ascribed to male characters and anime fans into a 'kawaii' shell; it mutates fans' desires into a grotesque representation of the taboo. (Boyd, 2016)

In summary, Boyd's exploration of Studio Trigger's subversions of gender is effective; because many of the women within *Kill la Kill* do not submit to gender roles, and Mako professes an attraction to Ryuuko's personality and body.

However, it is not certain if Mako and Ryuuko are same-sex lovers. Even though she ***does*** ask Ryuuko out on a 'date', they also invite Satsuki along, meaning that it could possibly also be interpretated as a 'girl's day out', depending on one's own individual perspective. Their relationship is left ambiguous by the creators.

In addition to that, people have also made arguments that Ryuuko may be asexual or in love with Senketsu instead, so there is no concrete way to interpret this. Nevertheless, Boyd is correct how *Kill la Kill* does challenge stereotypes of heterosexual romance and fanservice in anime. Even the more traditionally minded Ragyo Kiryūin has her ex-husband bow to down to her at her wedding, forcing him to adopt ***her*** name instead!

The male cast of characters gradually lose presence as the series continues, emphasising that the male presence is erased onscreen. But what about offscreen?

Nevertheless, as *Kill la Kill* is an anime full of conflicting mottos- some parts of the anime may not be as revolutionary as Boyd makes them out to be. In some cases, Boyd even ends up contradicting himself. A major example of this is when he tries to argue that Ryuuko is nothing but a phallic, empty character without any goals or personality.

Despite stating that Ryuuko is an avenger with an 'Electra Complex' (due to her fighting for her father's sake); he also tries to state that that she is nothing but a 'phallic girl'. This means that she is a blank slate of a heroine whose only purpose is to provide 'fanservice'- endlessly morphing into the phallic forms of the men she fights (for example countering a BDSM[20] clad student with BDSM armour of her own). She is hollow. (Boyd, 2016)

Although it is true that *Kill la Kill*'s fanservice is excessive and fights are riddled with nudity and BDSM, Ryuuko may not truly fit the definition of a 'phallic girl'. Japanese psychologist Tamaki's book *'Beautiful Fighting Girls'* (who defines the 'phallic girl' is in terms of anime) states that 'phallic girls' do not tend to fight for vengeance- they often play the role of a 'vacant' medium who serves as a protector of multiple worlds; whose powers act as an uncontrollable 'repulsive force'. (Tamaki, et al., 2011, p. 187)

Howbeit Ryuuko being used as a tool by many characters, no matter how many times they try to reduce her to a 'mere phallic girl', she eventually claws back control from such forces. Even if she is 'phallic' in the way in which her hybrid identity as both a human and life fibres (clothing) force her to serve as a medium between opposing forces, she indisputably retains a powerful will of her own.

[20] BDSM- bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism

Even once her vengeance wanes; she argues bitterly with friends and foes over her role in this war. In the end, she only decides to save the world because of the warm, weird love that Senketsu and the Mako family give her. In this regard, it can be concluded that although Ryuuko shares traits in common with the 'phallic girl'; no matter how many times her opponents try to conquer her, they cannot. Yes, she has destructive powers and is played like a puppet by many- but she is not hollow.

Furthermore, despite saying that Studio Trigger defies gender roles with fanservice; it also reinforces them. His description of how the cameras ogle Ryuuko, -titillating a male gaze- as the camera zooms in on her breasts and underwear as she fights- emphasises that the 'perverted' otaku fans aren't entirely erased from its narrative.

In addition to that, his own arguments on how Ryuuko is a 'phallic girl' proves that even Boyd himself can see that some forms of heteronormativity are still promoted within this anime.

Although this is a good article, I think it fails to address how *Kill la Kill* can be both liberating and heteronormative at the same time- it makes arguments for both cases, but possibly forgets to link them together.

Overall, both articles touch upon many themes such as consumerism, capitalism, alien/ parasitic invasion, fashion, and many other things. However, their focus is predominantly on gender and sexuality; making it impossible to fully understand their perspectives.

Although nudity and sexuality are linked in *Kill la Kill*; it would've been preferred if they also focused on the relationship between nudity and clothing. Interesting comments were also made about fashion being both a weapon of capitalism and fascism as well as notes on same-sex relationships; but I don't think they were explored in enough detail either.

To gain a deeper historical understanding of Studio Trigger, I also read articles about other anime that Imaishi played a vital role in. This includes *Gurren Lagann* and *FLCL*. Reading them provided a deeper understanding of what kinds of troupes or techniques Imaishi is famous for.

Josephy-Hernández' article on the portrayal of graphemes in anime highlights how graphemes (large colourful fonts that encapsulate the screen) are a famous trademark of *Gurren Lagann* and *Kill la Kill.* These shows have a trademark large font, and powerful visual effects. (Josephy-Hernández, 2017) His article provides an interesting glimpse into the stylism of their anime. (Josephy-Hernández, 2017)

From this it is clear to see just how precise and detailed Studio Trigger's creative processes are- the way in which they evolve from their soundless, white graphemes in *Gurren Lagann* into bold, red graphemes with accompanying sound effects in *Kill la Kill; illustrates* how Imaishi's team are endlessly improving the quality of their trademark style.

Another anime that is inexorably linked to *Kill la Kill* and Gurren Lagann is *FLCL*. Although *FLCL* is directed by Tsurumaki Kazuya[21]; members such as Imaishi also partook in its production. Ruh's article focuses on the protagonist, Takkun's coming-of-age journey in *FLCL*. He states that it is a 'postmodern anime'; due to its endless references to other cultural products (ranging from rock music to south park) , its acutely self-aware[22] behaviour; and finally, how FLCL has added such a variety of themes into its narrative that it becomes 'fragmented': it is an 'illogical' anime that encompasses everything, yet 'nothing' at the same time. (Ruh, 2005) *Kill la Kill* is extremely similar to this. It also prides itself on being 'nonsense' (Kill la Kill, 2013-2014); and is brimming with a variety of themes.

To summarise, these articles give the reader insight as to how these prior projects have paved the way for *Kill la Kill* – trademarks such as illogical pacing, creative graphemes, as well as 'highly charged' and crude storylines is what Imaishi, Gainax and Trigger staff are famous for.

One- Fascism in *Kill la Kill*'s Honnouji Academy

Fascism is hard to define. Payne states in his book *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* that fascism lacks a 'empirical definition'- meaning that it can be defined in many different ways.[23] For example, although fascism can be seen as right-wing authoritarianism- which relies on conservatism, aggression, and conventionalism to spread prejudice and extremism[24], a student of fascism named Ernst Nolte interprets it in a radically different manner[25].

To him, fascism arises from liberal democracy, as an insurgent movement that creates its own doctrines and policies in order to defy the notion of 'transience'. (Payne, 1983) In other words, the goal of fascist parties is to remodel society entirely.

It is certain that what makes a party 'fascist' is its denial of the ways of democracy: it doesn't want to exist in conjunction with other political parties, it wants to become the ***only*** party. Now, how does this relate to *Kill la Kill*?

The motto of *Kill la Kill* is **'fashion is fascism'**[26]. In its world, clothes are essential to one's status - people use their Goku Uniforms to conquer other schools and improve their own living conditions. In fact, the militarized uniform itself is a tool that the school council president, Satsuki Kiryūin wields as a symbol of status. Students become compliant, obedient followers in order to obtain and improve the rank of their Goku Uniforms- giving Satsuki complete dominance over them, as she successfully forces all the schools in Japan to bend to her will.

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[21] (IMDB, n.d.) a member of Gainax who also co-directed Evangelion.
[22] In FLCL, backgrounds morph; characters explicitly refer to their adventure as an 'anime', and the setting is always changing on a whim. Overall, it is a very confusing piece of media to watch. (Ruh, 2005)
[23] (Payne, 1983)
[24] (APA, 2020) in summary, these people have very traditional beliefs and use them to indoctrinate society into believing their supremacist ideals.
[25] (Payne, 1983)
[26] (Kobayashi, 2013)

The main villain also pulls a similar scheme but to a worse extent. When Ragyo Kiryūin threatens to destroy all forms of human diversity by sacrificing the entire human race to parasitic clothing, her methods are totalitarian –people are forced to yield their autonomy to clothing entirely- which Satsuki aptly classes as the 'bliss of slavery'.

From this, it is clear that both Satsuki and Ragyo's governing of Japan fits both Payne and Nolte's definitions- both societies are undoubtably fascist in their attempts to oppress society.

However, I would like to contrast *Kill la Kill's* take on fascism to Umberto Eco's theory named 'Ur-Fascism' (Eternal Fascism), which lists the characteristics of a fascist society. I believe this will provide a more holistic lens into the society of *Kill la Kill*. Umberto states that although some of the characteristics of Ur-Fascism contradict one another, he makes it clear that all forms of fascism have certain central concepts in common. (Eco, 1995)

As *Kill la Kill* is also a Japanese anime that takes great inspiration from the Shōwa Era, it will also be contrasted against certain aspects of the Japanese Empire system. Even though there is 'widespread agreement that the term 'fascism' must not be applied to Japan between 1930-1941'[27]; there is no denying the fact that during those times, the free will of the 'individual' was sacrificed in order to align with the goals of the Empire; which is arguably similar to a fascist system.

i. Kill la Kill and Ur-Fascism

Eco's theory is applicable, as it is backed by his real-life experiences of fascism. Ur-Fascism/ Eternal Fascism defines itself as a very contradictory system- it can operate in many different ways, yet all variations of it share something in common. (Eco, 1995) In its most diluted form, 'fascism is a cult of optimism and heroics'[28] –it is defined by its obsession with death and revolution. This sounds eerily similar to Satsuki's dictatorship in *Kill la Kill*; in which students willingly sacrifice themselves to conquer Japan.

They too are blinded by the concept of 'heroic sacrifice' and face all sorts of tumultuous challenges in order to prove their worth to Satsuki.

From this, it is certain that a defining factor of fascism lies in the fact that at its roots, fascism is nothing more than a fanatical system of heroic beliefs, that thrives upon impossible ideals and dreams to survive. However, in order to bypass its vagueness, Eco deconstructs this argument, by categorising a list of 14 attributes that are essential to a fascist system:

1. ***The Cult of Tradition (they make up their own mythology or twist history to fit their goals)***
2. *Traditionalism rejecting Modernism (hatred of materialism)*
3. *Irrationalism (action for action's sake) (thought is frowned upon, only actions have worth)*
4. ***Syncretistic Faith is weak to Analytical Criticism (fascism is an amalgamation of various religions and beliefs, but this makes it easy to criticise)***
5. ***Fear of Difference (fascism doesn't tolerate diversity)***

[27] (Mitchell, 1985)
[28] (Eco, 1995)

6. *Ur-Fascism derives from individual or social frustration (unhappy middle class)*
7. ***Nationalism (in which your only identity is your nation)***
8. *Jealousy of the Enemy (both overestimating and underestimating an enemy)*
9. ***Life is Lived for Struggle (everything relies on a final battle)***
10. ***Contempt for the Weak (Elitist Society)***
11. *Everybody is Educated to be a Hero (death cult in which people sacrifice themselves)*
12. ***Power becomes Inherently Sexual (Machoism) (sex becomes violent)***
13. ***Selective/ Qualitative Populism (the only voice of the people is their leader)***
14. *Newspeak (language that limits political reasoning)* (Eco, 1995)

Some features on this list align very well with *Kill la Kill*. The attributes highlighted in bold font shall be compared and contrasted to Satsuki's Honnouji Academy, as well as Ragyo's empire of life fibres and COVERS (clothing).

The first feature is **'the cult of tradition'**, in which people believe that fascism carries out the will of an ancient entity. (Eco, 1995) Ragyo Kiryūin certainly qualifies for this. The clothes that she uses to destroy the world-COVERS-are known as the forebearers of evolution, for humanity wouldn't have evolved if life fibres didn't attach themselves onto the first homo-sapiens during the Ice Age.

Episode 16 explains how the life fibres have been hibernating ever since homo-sapiens developed basic skills; waiting for the day in which humans will evolve enough for them to strike again. To guarantee this takeover, her family has carried on the ancient tradition of protecting life fibres for millennia.

By reawakening this ancient entity, Ragyo fulfils the dreams of her ancestors; and releases these ancient terrors upon the world. Following the decree of her mother, Ragyo- Satsuki also utilises the threads of these beings to make her uber-powerful Goku Uniforms.

In fact, these threads are known as *'banshi',* which are the threads of fate. In other words, humans must submit to the fate of being absorbed by clothes; and Ragyo will do anything in her power to ensure this. Satsuki unwittingly aids Ragyo by making a society of obedient followers who rely heavily on Goku uniforms- they are much weaker to the power of COVERS.

From the beginning, people were nothing but tools to fulfil this ancient prophecy.

These clothes are the apocryphal power behind the political agendas of both antagonists. Without these ancient life fibres; both antagonists' societies would've ceased to exist.

Therefore, fascism in *Kill la Kill* is like a form of enslavement, in which the archaic forces of the life fibres disrupt the potential of human growth.

Next is **'Syncretistic Faith is weak to Analytical Criticism'**. Syncretism is a system that combines multiple schools of thought and religion[29].

[29] (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

As Ur-fascist societies rely on syncretism to survive; it can easily be questioned by scientific thinkers. In order to evade such criticism, they outright ban all forms of disagreement[30]. In *Kill la Kill*, both Satsuki and Ragyo's societies are much more one-dimensional[31] than syncretic, but analytical criticism is certainly abhorred.

In Honnouji Academy; all talkback is severely punished- either by physical punishment or verbal harassment. In one episode, a student named Nagita releases newspapers that question the authority of Honnouji Academy and is indefinitely banned from school grounds for 'soapboxing'[32]. From this, it becomes clear that Satsuki will dispose of all opposition.

As for Ragyo- she either kills or brainwashes any forms of opposition. In fact, she effectively manages to manipulate the entire Japanese populace with her brand of REVOCS clothing- meaning that Ryuuko, Honnouji and Nudist Beach are the only ones who can thwart Ragyo's world conquest.

In other words, people have **'eyes but fail to see, ears but fail to hear'[33]**, for Ragyo entirely rids people of the chance to defy her.

Therefore, both of these rulers will do anything in their power to destroy any voices of dissent- emphasising that within *Kill la Kill*; indoctrination is key to achieving their goals.

Neither Satsuki nor Ragyo tolerate any forms of diversity. Although both of them fight bitterly against one another, they vanquish all other people in their wake. Eco refers to this as the '**Fear of Difference'**, in which fascist societies garner support by 'exacerbating' the fear of diversity- fascist societies prime themselves on fighting against alleged intruders. (Eco, 1995) This is the major flaw of Satsuki Kiryuin's dictatorship.

She goes out of her way to destroy all other Japanese schools; and will even destroy potential allies. Even when people align with her goals; if they don't assimilate- she rejects them. She eliminates everyone else, not only as a means to fool her mother- but also because she just doesn't trust anybody who doesn't obey.

Satsuki's Honnouji thrives on a fear of rebels and outsiders, and this is what ultimately leads to her downfall. Sadly, she is only able to win against Ragyo once she stops fearing her 'intruders' and works alongside them.

Therefore, *Kill la Kill* certainly advises **against** this strain of fascism.

It proves that people are only strong once they accept diversity, and respect those who are different to them. By teaming up with her past enemies and fighting alongside Ryuuko; Satsuki is finally able to defeat her mother Ragyo. Ragyo's society is definitely the most discriminatory in its desire to turn everyone into 'one cloth'. People are not meant to be the same.

[30] (Eco, 1995)
[31] Honnouji's main school of thought consists of deference to Satsuki, National Conquest, and Goku Uniforms. Ragyo's society functions on fanatically worshipping life fibres.
[32] (Kill la Kill, 2013-2014)
[33] (Kill la Kill, 2013-2014)

Another focal aspect of fascism is that its rulers believe that **'Life is Lived for Struggle'**. Described by Eco as the 'Armageddon Complex', this details how fascist systems thrive on 'permanent warfare', preparing themselves for a final battle. (Eco, 1995, p. 8) However, after a 'final battle' comes peace- and peace is a foreign concept to a fascist ruler. This is also the case in *Kill la Kill*. Satsuki Kiryūin lives to fight.

Ever since the age of five, she has been conquering opponents and gradually raising her army to build Honnouji Academy, a school that thrives on vanquishing the entire Japanese nation- as well as her mother's army of primordial life fibre enemies. War becomes the very essence of Honnouji Academy, leaving students no room for peace. However, despite her best efforts, her mother still manages to dethrone her.

From this, it is clear that although *Kill la Kill* somewhat justifies Satsuki's war-hardened approach as a means to stop Ragyo's onslaught, it highlights just how unhealthy it is to dedicate one's life solely to battle.

The worst example of this is shown in the final battle between Ryuuko and Ragyo. When Ryuuko offers Ragyo her mercy, Ragyo rips out her own heart- effectively killing herself. This raises an important issue about fascism in *Kill la Kill*: it is the enemy of peace, and a corrupting force that drives its rulers insane.

There are many examples of characters showing '**Contempt for the Weak'** in *Kill la Kill*. Honou Town is a place that judges individuals worth by the star ranking of their uniform: 0* student families live in the slums- which is the largest area by far; 1* students live in apartment blocks, 2* students live in luxurious mansions, and as for the 3*- only 4 of them exist, so the amount of privilege they receive is unknown.

Satsuki is fully aware of this- she calls her students 'swine in human clothing' that are 'domesticated on establishment'- Honou Town was purposely meant to operate as a hegemony. By purposely barring lower ranks of students from basic needs and rights, whilst improving the quality of life for higher ranks of students, she essentially creates a society that thrives on contempt to survive. Eco aptly describes this:

'Since the group is hierarchically organized (according to a military model), every subordinate leader despises his own underlings, and each of them despises his inferiors. This reinforces the sense of mass elitism." (Eco, 1995)

This is clearly the case in *Kill la Kill*: in as early as episode one, the leader of the Boxing Club shows extreme contempt for Ryuuko (who has no status at all), aiming to murder her for speaking out of line. But then because she escapes, his superiors- the Elite 4- punish him with a severe beating.

However, because one of the members of the Elite 4 (Sanageyama Uzu) is also the head of all sports clubs, he faces a warning from Satsuki- who he is a subordinate of as well.

From this, it becomes clear that a fascist society consists of a hierarchy of superiors and inferiors who all share the fate of being severely punished if they disobey. This is bound to cause mutual hatred between those who serve Satsuki. Therefore, it is certain that *Kill la Kill*

has made an accurate analogy of the inner workings of fascism- it relies heavily on forces such as opprobrium to survive.

Up next is the link between **Fascism and Sexuality**. Eco uses the term 'Machismo' to describe this- people expel their repressed sexual urges in battle; blurring the lines between sexuality, violence, and power. (Eco, 1995) There are many examples of this within *Kill la Kill:* the school disciplinarian of the Elite 4 (Gamagoori Ira), doles out punishment on a daily basis- yet is also a masochist that uses BDSM armour in battle. He even tries to mould Ryuuko into becoming the 'perfect student', via bondage, emphasising how sexuality is used to dominate others.

The main villain, Ragyo, utilizes horrendous acts of sexual humiliation and torture to manipulate Ryuuko and Satsuki- who are both her daughters. The twisted and depraved nature of fascism distorts sexuality to the point of it being utilised as a weapon of destruction. As Roger Eatwell states in his manifesto on fascism, *'Fascism has a sexual side too- but it is a world of uniforms and discipline, of bondage and sadomasochism, rather than love'*[34], and that is indeed also the case for *Kill la Kill*. However, in *Kill la Kill*- love is what wins in the end. Ryuuko's bonds with Senketsu, Mako and her family has much greater power than the abusive forces of fascist control.

In fact, when Satsuki's empire is reduced to dust, her Elite 4 still stands by her side- because they **truly** care for her. In the end, fascist dictatorships pale in comparison to genuine bonds.

Therefore, Studio Trigger demonstrates that love is much stronger than the oppressive forces of fascism.

ii. Kill la Kill, Ur-Fascism, and the Japanese Empire

The final feature of Ur-Fascism is **Selective Populism.** Eco defines this as when individuals have no rights, representing nothing more than the 'common will' of their leader. Their personal thoughts and opinions are ignored, with the leader serving as the basis for them all. (Eco, 1995) In other words, fascism strips humans of their individual will, reducing them to mere pawns.

Regarding this, the Japanese Empire system from 1868-1945 shares commonalities with this. From the Meiji era until the Mid-Shōwa era (1870s- 1945), the emperor gradually gained full control over the Japanese populace. Manzenreiter (2001) details that after the Meiji Restoration of 1868[35]-when the emperor came into power- they implemented many new systems, such as compulsory schooling and the Conscription Army; as a way to create a national identity for all Japanese to follow. (Manzenreiter, 2014)

However, this process became particularly malignant during the Early Shōwa period (1920s-1945). From 1919, they had already implemented the *kōdo system*, in which absolute fealty

[34] (Eatwell, 1996)

[35] This restoration ended the Tokugawa Shogunate, in which a shogun (samurai warlord) used to rule the country instead of the emperor. (The Editors Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.)

and loyalty to the emperor was essential for it to thrive.[36] During the war period, they also signed alliance treatises with Nazi Germany and even had a dissolution of political parties in 1940[37], emphasising how authoritarianism became a pivotal aspect of Japanese politics at the time- earning them the moniker of 'Shōwa Statism'.

Despite this information, what really adheres to the idea of 'selective populism' is the fact that during the war period, the emperor placed heavy sanctions 'on things ranging from foodstuffs and clothing to theatre performances', but as 'willing sacrifices' for the emperor, Japanese citizens would have no choice but to obey this heavy state control. (Lee, 2012) In the implementation of items such as a 'wartime citizens uniform' which doubled as military uniform; all citizens were pruned for battle. (Lee, 2012)

This represents the very core of selective populism- all Japanese were forced to make sacrifices for the emperor and more or less were forced to become a part of his army. Whether individuals disagreed with the emperor's policies or not didn't matter, for they had no semblance of choice. This is undoubtedly similar to fascism.

Kill la Kill is similar too, as Satsuki also mobilizes everybody in Honou Town for battle. Just like the Japanese Emperor system, she too gives students all-purpose uniforms for battle, places heavy state control on all citizens; and will even manipulate the entire town to serve her needs. Individuals have no choice but to follow her whims, due to the political power of her mother, Ragyo- making her totalitarian system almost flawless.

Therefore, *Kill la Kill* may be providing an analysis into the more extreme aspects of the Japanese Empire system- it can be concluded that although they regard Satsuki's attempts to thwart her mother as admirable, her methodology sacrifices the wants and needs of its people; hence why she only wins once she gives up her rights as ruler and works alongside other people.

Studio Trigger may be emphasising that systems such as Fascism and the Emperor System of Japan are dangerous in the way in which they limit freedom of expression, as seen in their vehement denial of human individuality.

Overall, *Kill la Kill* presents two very fascist systems in its narrative: Satsuki's school empire and Ragyo's clothing invasion. However, seeing how both systems end up being destroyed; with Ryuuko's diverse gang of guerrilla warriors and friends saving the day, emphasises that a diverse, open society is much more powerful than a dictatorship.

People must have the right to express themselves openly within society, for they are not meant to be like 'one cloth'- they are not meant to submit to a singular ruler. By looking at Eco's Ur-Fascism and the Shōwa Statism of the Japanese Emperor system, it becomes clear that this anime doesn't approve of fascism.

[36] (Manzenreiter, 2014)
[37] (Manzenreiter, 2014)

Ryuuko only decides to save the world in episode 22 to protect the individuality of the 'crazy' people surrounding her- emphasising that in *Kill la Kill,* fascism is the opposite of love and acceptance, for it destroys the bonds between people.

Two- The War Between Clothing and Nudity

Although the numerous clashes between the forces of Nudist Beach against both Satsuki and Ragyo's clothing empires presents clothing and nudity as polar opposites- both forces are showcased in a myriad of ways within *Kill la Kill*. Is being naked liberating, or is it shameful? Are clothes symbolic of control? Or do they represent individuality instead? This section shall attempt to answer these questions.

i. The Purpose of Clothing

Clothes rule as a symbol of hegemonic power in *Kill la Kill*. However, when characters choose their clothing, they become infinitely more powerful- as seen in the case of Ryuuko and Senketsu. When she wears Senketsu, she is formidable. This is a far cry from when Ragyo forces Ryuuko into clothing that brainwashes her identity, showcasing how clothes can be used to vanquish the rights and wills of individuals; giving clothing almost biblical proportions of power.

As Studio Trigger's portrayal of clothes is so multi-faceted, each argument shall be analysed separately.

Clothing as a reflection of power, status, and control

Within the world of *Kill la Kill*, the primary role of clothing is to serve as a bastion of power. Goku Uniforms can enhance students' power tenfold, and the higher the rank of uniform you receive; the more benefits you'll be endowed with.

For this very reason, Satsuki can easily manipulate her student populace by promising them higher-ranked uniforms if they obey her orders. Goku Uniforms are a symbol of wealth as well, as only the strongest students- the Elite 4, are allowed to wear 3* Goku Uniforms.

In this sense, the status that these uniforms symbolise is similar to the historical origin of the Japanese school uniform, as well.

In Namba's *'Breaking the Dress Code: The Changing Role of Japanese School Uniforms'*, she discusses how uniforms were originally used to distinguish the poor from the elite- Western-style uniforms were a luxury[38]. In fact, quite a few educational institutions implemented uniforms that were based off military attire to *'go side by side with their military education'*. (Namba, 2018) Uniforms symbolised the extremity of the Japanese Empire System-they were determined to raise students into obedient followers, and this even trickled down into the image of student's school attire.

An interesting point is that *Kill la Kill*'s Goku Uniforms are also based off naval attire. The anime makes an explicit reference in Episode 2 in regard to how Goku Uniforms are based

[38] (Namba, 2018)

off the Japanese Gakuran (military jacket) and Serafuku (sailor uniform); whose history is rooted in military gear.

In addition to this, Goku Uniforms have been made not only to command the student populace, but also 'pave the way to humanity's future'- emphasising how uniforms are weaponized by authoritarian societies. (Kill la Kill, 2013-2014)

Therefore, Studio Trigger may be raising awareness of how clothing can become a symbol of control- uniforms are weapons of conformity. In this case, their attire reflects the will of the ruler; effectively moulding said students into exact replicas of themselves.

Authority figures also oppress people by forcing them into clothes. In Harvey's guide to clothing, he mentions how parents 'hugely impose on children, who cannot buy their own clothes'. In other words, clothes are used as a means to mould children to fit their parents' ideals.

As expressed in Nancy Darling P.H.D.'s article in *Psychology Today*, parents who force children into clothing are *'overstepping their boundaries'*, for this intrudes upon their personal rights, and attacks their sense of self-worth. (Darling, 2012)

This is also seen in the anime. The protagonist, Ryuuko Matoi is obligated to wear two crucial outfits throughout the series. However, one outfit becomes a vital part of her identity, whilst the other tries to strip her of it entirely.

The first outfit, Senketsu- is a sentient piece of clothing made from life fibres, which Ryuuko's father made in the hopes that she will wear it to save the world. At first, Senketsu certainly forces himself on Ryuuko- desperate to devour her blood-and subjects her to severe embarrassment.

In this sense, the outfit is akin to a prophetic curse, one that compels Ryuuko to abide by the whims of her ancenstors. Her father has forced a heavy burden onto Ryuuko's shoulders. However, as Ryuuko and Senketsu gradually begin to form a genuine bond- the outfit becomes a special part of her identity; helping her come to terms with herself.

What once paid no heed to her wants and needs as an individual ended up becoming her best friend.

On the other hand, once Ragyo Kiryūin discovers that Ryuuko Matoi is none other than the daughter that she abandoned at birth, she is quick to bend Ryuuko's will to her own. She brainwashes Ryuuko via psychological torture; forcibly sowing a new life fibre outfit into her flesh. This is the worst kind of imposition a parent could ever inflict upon their child, emphasising how authority can use clothing to deprive a person of their individual rights.

Therefore, Studio Trigger makes an important message about clothing and freedom- when clothing is imposed upon someone, it is likely being used as a means to instil compliance and erode them of their own autonomy. People should have the right to wear what they want.

Clothing and the Bible

Within *Kill la Kill*, Ragyo's scenes can be interpreted as making analogies to the bible.

Firstly, in one of Ragyo's earliest appearances within the anime, she hosts a huge REVOCS conglomerate meeting to an array of men with identical faces and suits. They lack distinctiveness due to them all wearing identical suits, effectively making them Ragyo's army of clones.

During her speech, she references the biblical fall of Adam and Eve, who were thrown out of the garden of Eden once consuming the forbidden fruit of knowledge. This act led to them developing a sense of shame for their nudity for the first time.

In fact, Ragyo insinuates that 'man's original sin' originates from this sense of shame, which implies the idea that clothing **itself** is a sin. (Kill la Kill, 2013-2014) What makes this interesting is that because Ragyo's tyranny relies heavily on the shame that people possess for their naked bodies to work, her methods of torture often aim to deprive people of their bodily rights.

In this sense, Ragyo is like the biblical serpent that leads humans astray, by making them subservient to clothing.

The link between nudity, clothing and sin is further explored within **Genesis 2:4-3:24** from the **New International Version** of the Bible. It depicts Adam and Eve's ejection from the Garden of Eden. When Eve asks the Serpent whether the fruit will kill her or not, the serpent's reply is this:

'You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."' (Bible: New International Version, n.d.)

From here, we can see that what leads Adam and Eve astray is the knowledge that the fruit departs upon them. Because it gives them too much wisdom, they begin to develop feelings such as shame, and lose appreciation for their naked origins. That is the fault of humankind- wisdom made them forget their roots.

Just like the serpent that taints humankind with its wisdom-enhancing forbidden fruit, Ragyo leads humanity astray with life-fibre infused clothing- that endows humans with greater power in exchange for their free will.

Although Studio Trigger hasn't confirmed this, it can be inferred from this interpretation that clothing's biggest sin comes from the fact that it prevents people from truly appreciating their naked bodies. This anime preaches against bodily shame.

Biblical analogy is also rife in the final battle between Ragyo and Life Fibres against Ryuuko, Nudist Beach, and Satsuki's ragtag band of allies. Many fans point out that the way in which Ragyo is murdered upon a cross- only to come back to life- is very similar to Jesus' resurrection.

The flood of life fibres that devours everyone can be compared to the flood in Noah's Ark. However, these theories cannot be proven, and are based mostly upon assumptions. Nonetheless, one aspect of the final battle can be claimed to embody **The Second Coming of Christ**.

The Second Coming of Christ (otherwise known as ***'The Rapture'***) is split into many concepts, such as millennialism, premillennialism, and dispensationalism. However, the one fundamental aspect of all Rapture theories is that the world is going to end, and Jesus Christ will reappear from the dead to carry *'the faithful believers off to heaven before the Tribulation*[39].' (BBC- Religions, 2011) In other words, the Rapture is characterized by rewarding all believers, whilst condemning all non-believers to hell with the devil.

If one were to take a semiotic approach to this, one could argue that Ragyo is a subverted- if not extremely twisted- portrayal of Christ, for she helps the once-dormant life fibres and COVERS rise once again; whilst the naked humans that rebel against her are condemned. If life fibres destroy Earth, it'll be made into a **'single cloth'**- a paradise that only benefits those who succumb to life fibres.

This theory may sound far-fetched at first, however in Harvey's book on clothes, he states that in the second coming of Christ, 'the saved will be robed' in white like Jesus and the Angels; and the damned will be 'naked' like demons. (Harvey, 2008) From this, it is clear that nudity represents sin, whilst clothing reflects the will of the angels. As he states, white robes represent ancient ideals, and are never changing- their goal is to return society to the ancient paradise of the past. (Harvey, 2008)

This is very similar to *Kill la Kill*. Within the final battle, not only does Ragyo resurrect herself from the dead, but also traps human souls within an army of white suits (COVERS), that use humans as batteries to survive. These COVERS are also an 'ancient ideal', who existed long before the era of humankind.

Because of this, if humans wish to rebel, they have no choice but to strip naked. They are like the demons who are punished by Christ during the Rapture. In fact, Ragyo's final outfit *Shinra- Kōketsu*[40] is omnipotent and omniscient: as the master of all life fibres, humans and even clothing is rendered useless against its power. Just like how it name uses the Japanese kanji for God (神)- this outfit is certainly the **god of all clothing**.

The only beings with the power to confront her are Ryuuko and Senketsu- who had to absorb all other humans' clothing to even have a fighting chance against her. The reason for that is because together, they are an interdimensional entity. Senketsu is sentient clothing infused with human blood, and Ryuuko is a human whose body is fused with life fibres. Because of this, they are neither the 'naked sinners' that represents humankind, nor are they 'Christ-like figures' like Life Fibres and COVERS.

[39] The Tribulation- When the Antichrist and all sinners shall be purged from this world, in order to reform the world in God's image.

[40] (神羅纈纈)It looks similar to a traditional Japanese wedding dress.

Due to the fact that they are outsiders- who can neither receive salvation or punishment- they are empowered enough to resist the dichotomy that exists between humanity and clothing.

Overall, this theory provides surprising insight into the eminence behind clothing. This biblical analogy shows just how exclusive and controlling concepts of 'salvation' are. Ragyo's resurrection of the ancient past pays no heed to the individuality of humankind, nor does it care to pay recognition to the autonomy of human free will.

By giving Ragyo (and clothes) such tremendous power- her existence becomes a form of prophecy, or an unbeatable fate.

Studio Trigger may be promoting ideas of human free will and choice here. Humans in the anime are much more powerful when naked then when they're forced to conform to the will of life-fibre infused clothing. However, as Ryuuko and Senketsu only manage to win with their combined powers of genetics and free will; the anime ultimately shows just how monumental circumstances are to overcoming your fate, as well.

Therefore, clothing raises important issues about free will and control. Humans may be stronger once they accept their nudity- however, people still need to embrace clothing as well. What matters most is that a person has the right to choose what to wear, to resist the need to conform to society's rules.

This is distinctly emphasized in the relationship between Ryuuko and Senketsu, who create a powerful hybrid identity with both humanity and clothing. In addition to this, characters who have the benefit of receiving their own customized Goku Uniforms are also strengthened considerably.

This is because humans are meant to be in control of their own identities.

ii. Nudity

In *Kill la Kill*, nudity is associated with objectification, shame, freedom, and protest. Although it is the antithesis to clothing, one thing remains the same- just like clothing; **nudity is only empowering if it is a choice**. In Carr-Gomm's *Brief History of Nakedness, he* describes how context is essential to the act of stripping:

'Stripping can be an active or passive activity. When we are passive and someone strips us, this can be thrilling or terrifying, erotic, or humiliating. Intention and context are everything.' (Carr Gomm, 2012)

Being naked is only beneficial in certain circumstances. If we are stripped by the wrong person, or our naked body is subject to leering glares; nudity can become much more objectifying than liberating. We are only empowered once we consent to nudity.

This issue is explored between Episodes 1-3 of *Kill la Kill*, as it details Ryuuko's internal struggle with accepting Senketsu. In episode 1, Ryuuko is purposely lured into her father's basement- in which Senketsu forcibly strips her of all clothing; coercing Ryuuko into wearing him. In this case, the act of stripping is terrifying, as this ignores her autonomy as a person.

However, said piece of clothing gives her the power to save Mako; so, she begrudgingly wears him.

Despite this, when she transforms into Senketsu for the first time, she is subject to endless droves of leering and perverted stares, as her opponent subjects her to sexual harassment.

In his article on the relationship between nudity and shame, King states that 'Over thousands of generations, we've learned that showing off a naked body sends out sexual signals that threaten the security of mating pairs.' (King, 2009) When nudity is treated like a signal for sex, the naked body warps into an object of lust.

In addition to that, in Japan Today's article about how perceptions of nudity have changed with time; it states that because Japanese society wanted to appear civilised to Europe and the Americas, nudity became a taboo[41].

With the additions of legislation such as the Nudity Ban in the Shōwa Era, nudity 'took on an erotic and mystified meaning'. In other words, because the act of uncovering a naked body is no longer the norm, it is reduced to nothing more than a moral perversion. (Japan Today, 2013)

Linking this back to Ryuuko's turmoil in episode 1, it becomes dreadfully clear that nudity is a stigmatising force, due to how everyone else has determined the status of Ryuuko's nudity for her. They have taken all agency away from her own body, by regarding her as nothing more than a sexualised image. Therefore, it is clear that nudity is a disempowering force if you have no control over the perception of your own body.

Hence why not only Ryuuko, but other characters such as Sanageyama and Gamagoori Ira are also portrayed as feeble characters when stripped for the first time: their bodily parts are covered in a gloomy, powerful dark shadow.

It's only once they accept their naked bodies that their portrayal changes, as seen in characters such as Aikuro Mikisugi- whose glowing, naked body becomes a standard part of the show.

Studio Trigger likely pushes the message that we should embrace our own nudity. In Episode 3, when Ryuuko and Senketsu face off against Satsuki and Junketsu[42], this message becomes evident.

Although Satsuki's clothing is just as skimpy as Ryuuko's, people regale her naked body with pride and respect- a marked contrast from how they mock and tease Ryuuko's. The episode declares that this is because Satsuki's more goal driven than Ryuuko[43]; but I believe it is actually because of Satsuki's tremendous reputation amongst her peers.

Satsuki is a feared dictator with immense power, whilst Ryuuko is a rebellious transfer student- making it clear that when one lacks status, they are subjected to harsher abuse in

[41] (Japan Today, 2013)

[42] 純潔 pure blood

[43] Satsuki states that she'll willingly bare her breasts to the world for more power.

the world of *Kill la Kill*. However, when Ryuuko finally gives in and 'gets naked'- there is a fundamental change: not only does her power grow exponentially as her and Senketsu learn to trust and love one another; she also becomes immune to the leering stares of outsiders.

This is because she has developed the ability to shape her own personal identity with her naked body in a way that requires no input from others. In other words, self-acceptance is integral to nudity.

Carr-Gomm provides an excellent explanation for this:

'Human beings are at their most vulnerable when naked but when engaged in a protest, are also strangely powerful. They represent fearlessness, courage' -because once you utilize your nudity for your own goals- *'the owner of the body takes control and decides to make use of its power to command attention, rather than subjecting itself to exploitation by commercial interests.' (Carr Gomm, 2012)*

If others wish to shame and objectify your naked body, you must reclaim it. This is the ultimate form of protest against authority. And it is for this very reason why the guerrilla forces that rival the likes of Satsuki's Empire and Ragyo's life-fibres are named none other than **'Nudist Beach'**- a place that is the epitome of naked self-expression.

Studio Trigger may be affirming that once a person accepts themselves and their nudity; they are an unstoppable force.

Overall, nudity is a force that individuals need to accept and own, so that external forces lose all power over them. Studio Trigger seems to be advocating for people to be their utmost authentic selves- whether they're naked or clothed. The main message here is that one should not let others influence their identity.

Finale- Conclusion

In conclusion, pivotal themes such as fascism, nudity and clothing communicate many important messages to viewers about how they should preserve their sense of individuality and creative freedom.

Although *Kill la Kill* is an anime bursting at the seams with possible interpretations- that gives viewers the chance to interpret the anime in their own way- Studio Trigger's advocation of the right to express oneself seems to be located at its very core. Just like the readings of the literature review, I too have looked at the implications behind similar themes such as nudity- however, I wished to also focus on the role of politics and biblical analogy.

Overall, this anime has definitely subverted viewer expectations by presenting clothing as a weapon of dictatorship. It showcases how vital image is to the power of authoritarian systems, and calls attention to the way in which image and status is tightly regulated by such rulers.

The anime is also revolutionary in the way in which its characters only rise above their suffering once they gain ownership of both their clothed and nude identities. *Kill la Kill* is a

conundrum of pure chaos, yet there is method to its madness. Although it prides itself on being **'nonsense'**; the very **'nonsense'** that *Kill la Kill* embodies is liberating.

Therefore, this anime is worth researching- in an era full of corrupt politics, society is in dire need of releasing its constraints from humans, in order to let them live the lives that they truly want to lead. Though its setting is steeped in inspiration from the Shōwa past; it is arguably very modern.

For example, its warnings about how fascism threatens identity, growth and love are particularly alarming when contrasted against the landscape of politics today, in which dangerous political regimes-that are similar to Satsuki's- are on the rise again.

With policies that discriminate against those with varying religions, sexualities, disabilities, and races; these regimes threaten to eviscerate the concept of 'diversity' entirely. **Societies worldwide need to learn how to accept diversity, or they will eventually fall to ruin.**

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